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# Army Retirement Services

## Current News

### In this issue:

**Gates: Troop surge will take time to judge**

**Retired Soldiers and Spouses – Telling the Army story**

**Army Chief of Staff discusses 'way ahead'**

**New technology at Army birthday event**

**Army's newest units to address Soldier medical care, transition nationwide**

**Lean Six Sigma efforts near \$2B in savings**

**Information for Retired Soldiers in your recruiting mission:**

**Army introduces 2-year enlistment bonus, raises 3-year bonus**

**TRICARE is adding My Benefits Web tool**

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### **Gates: Troop surge will take time to judge**

**BAGHDAD (American Forces Press Service)** – The U.S. troop surge into Iraq is just starting to have its full-intended impact, and it will take time to judge its effectiveness, Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates said after meeting with U.S. and Iraqi leaders. Gates met with Multinational Force Iraq Commander Army GEN David H. Petraeus, U.S. Ambassador Ryan Crocker, Iraqi political leaders and U.S. troops on the ground. The secretary praised the two leaders for their efforts in working for reconciliation in Iraq.

"These two are among America's finest public servants," he said. "The American people can count on them to provide honest, candid and realistic appraisals of what's going on in Iraq, good and bad."

Crocker and Petraeus are due to make an assessment in September as to whether the U.S. troop surge has been effective in quelling violence and prompting political progress.

Gates said that with the recent arrival of the fifth additional brigade into Iraq, the full impact of the U.S. troop surge, which began building a few months ago, is just now beginning. It remains to be seen how much progress will be made over the next two or three months on the 18 benchmarks President Bush and Congress included in the Iraq war funding bill, he said.

However, while the benchmarks are important, it's also important to be aware of what's happening at the provincial and local level, such as the "ground up" effort that has been so successful in Anbar province, Gates said.

"The benchmarks primarily focus on a national level, and we have to pay attention to those because they are in the legislation, but there is this other aspect to it," Gates said.

Crocker told reporters that he is pressing hard to meet benchmarks, and the Iraqi government is pushing itself, but progress has been frustratingly slow.

Crocker said that Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has stepped up as a leader following the Samarra mosque bombing by enforcing curfews, convening the presidency council to get Sunni, Shiia and Kurdish leaders' impressions on how to deal with the crisis, and traveling to Samarra to demonstrate his direct involvement in the potential crises following.

Gates also visited the Nadain Joint Security Station in the southeastern sector of Baghdad, where he met with Iraqi police and military members, in addition to U.S. troops from the 217th Field Artillery Battalion based in Ft Carson, CO. Because the joint team has developed relationships with residents, the station's presence has been credited with helping reduce the number of violent attacks within its area of responsibility.

"By maintaining a continued presence in Baghdad neighborhoods, residents are more secure and more willing to help break the cycle of violence," Gates said. "(Our troops) are doing a superb job under difficult conditions. They deserve our deepest gratitude for their sacrifice and those of their families."

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## Retired Soldiers and Spouses – Telling the Army story

As we promised, we'll be providing sources to help you continue to tell the Army story. Army Chief of Staff (CSA) GEN George W. Casey, Jr., wants the Army to empower you to perform this important mission. Your support is especially important in situations where the media doesn't seem to be giving the full story.

For example, if you go to the [Army Homepage](http://www.army.mil) (<http://www.army.mil>), on the right side of the page, you'll find "The Army Today" which links to the latest broadcasts on hot Army topics. Currently, this is linked to report on the Army birthday celebration; however, the featured articles change often so it pays to bookmark the site and visit it frequently. Articles featured below include an interview with the CSA on the "way ahead" for the Army, new technology unveiled during the birthday celebration, efforts to improve the treatment of Wounded Warriors, and savings success through Lean Six Sigma. These articles are followed by information you can use when encouraging young people to consider the Army. Please share this information with your friends and neighbors.

## Army Chief of Staff discusses 'way ahead'

**HEIDELBERG, Germany (Army News Service)** – CSA GEN George W. Casey, Jr called the U.S. Army in Europe's mission "an important part of our overall Army effort" during a theater-wide visit to talk to troops about the "way ahead". He outlined his seven initiatives, which he said are designed to sharpen the focus on transformation efforts:

- Accelerate growth and readiness improvements in the Army;
- Increase support to Soldiers and Families;
- Maintain continuity and momentum in modernization;

- Enhance the reserve components' operational capabilities;
- Refine the Army's institutional policies and programs to better serve an expeditionary Army at war; and
- Improve the Army's strategic communications.

He added, "I was the Vice Chief of Staff of the Army when we began this transformation effort, and so I bought into the basic correctness of the direction of that effort four years ago. So you're not going to see any sharp right- or left-hand turns in the direction the U.S. Army is headed in its transformation."

GEN Casey, who in February completed 32 months as Multinational Force-Iraq commander, said Army transformation is closely tied to operations and preparing Soldiers for conflict, as the war on terrorism nears the end of its sixth year.

"I can tell you that the Soldiers that I've seen across the Army, a lot of them preparing to go back to Iraq or Afghanistan, understand what's at stake here for the United States and for our allies," he said. "I must say, I saw it on the ground in Iraq every day: the young men and women of the coalition, they get it. They understand what they're doing for their countries."

His advice to Soldiers preparing to deploy, he said, is to pay attention to their training.

"At the small-unit level, success in Iraq and Afghanistan, much like success in any conflict, is grounded on effective standards and discipline in the small units," he said. "We are getting better and better in ... replicating the environments that these Soldiers are going into, and if they take full advantage of the training that they'll get here (in Grafenwoehr and Hohenfels), I think they'll be quite successful."

The Chief of Staff also addressed the recent increase in deployment tour length. He said there were three primary reasons for instituting 15-month deployments: first, to give the commanders more flexibility; second, to give Soldiers and Families predictability; and finally, to ensure deploying brigades had sufficient training time at home station.

Sheila Casey, who was traveling with her husband, said spouses across the Army have told her frequency and duration of deployments is a top concern.

She said her central message to the Soldiers, spouses and Family members of U.S. Army, Europe, is, "Hang in there. This is tough, I know it's tough. I know these extended deployments are hard. Thank you for everything you're doing each and every day."

## New technology at Army Birthday event

**WASHINGTON (Army News Service)** - The Army celebrated its 232nd birthday by displaying some of the newest clothing, personal equipment and weaponry coming on line to support warfighters.

"We're demonstrating the near-term as well as future-force technology coming down the pike to support the Soldier," said Matthew Ociepa, public affairs officer for the Tank Automotive Research, Development and Engineering Center, in Warren, MI.

As he demonstrated the new "IBOT," a small unmanned ground vehicle, Army LTC Coll Haddon, a deputy director at the center, talked about the Army's new approach to developing technology. Gone, he said, are the days when engineers came up with new

concepts, sent completed products to units to see what they thought of them, then made the necessary changes.

Today, Soldier-development collaboration begins at the drawing-board stage. "We've got engineers sitting with the Soldiers from the very beginning, talking together about what they're developing," LTC Haddon said. "We're 'greening' the engineers and 'geeking' the Soldiers."

SFC Ralph Brewer, a robotics noncommissioned officer stationed at Ft Belvoir, VA, said he's seen vast improvements during his 20 years in the military in how the Army fields new equipment.

"My job is to make sure that what we field is Soldier-proof," he said. "We're working to outfit Soldiers with the best stuff we can. But at the same time, we're making sure that it's developed with a consideration of how the Soldier would use it to plan and carry out a mission."

SFC Brewer said the new Future Combat System is a combat multiplier because "it allows Soldiers to do more missions with fewer people."

He also likes that incorporating unmanned vehicles helps remove Soldiers from the threats they face. "I can get a new tire or a new computer," he said. "But this is all about the Soldier. We want to save lives."

At a nearby tent, LTC John Lemondes, from the Program Executive Office Soldier project, displayed some new clothing and individual equipment items under development or being fielded.

All are designed to make Soldiers more capable, more comfortable, and less encumbered with heavy, bulky equipment, he said. Affordability is another major concern, he said.

"We're focused on increased comfort, survivability and ultimately, making Soldiers more lethal," he said.

What's particularly impressive, LTC Lemondes said, is the speed with which new gear is going from concept to testing to fielding. Compared to the past, "we're doing it at light speed," he said.

LTC Lemondes pointed to the array of items on his display table, including a new combat shirt to be worn under body armor in lieu of a blouse and T-shirt, as examples. "Two years ago, most of these items were no more than an idea," he said. "That's the big difference."

After viewing the displays, some people sampled some of the combat rations slated to hit the field within the next two years. MAJ Christopher Hobart, from the Army Transformation Office, tried the new beef brisket, pulled buffalo chicken, and chicken pesto pasta entrees, as well as a "home-style biscuit." While not raving about any particular meal, MAJ Hobart declared all as good as most microwavable products sold at grocery stores. In fact, he said he liked that some off-the-shelf items are being included in the ration packages.

But what impressed MAJ Hobart the most was the variety of the new combat meals being offered. He said he remembers all too well a training exercise earlier in his career when his unit ended up eating chicken cacciatore twice a day for an entire two-week period. "I never ate chicken cacciatore again," he said.

When it comes to combat meals, "variety is nice," Maj. Hobart said. "And the food that Soldiers get is a big factor in their morale."

## Army's newest units to address Soldier medical care, transition nationwide

The U.S. Army has announced a series of improvements for wounded Soldiers' medical care and outpatient assistance to prepare them for continued, successful military service or transition to active citizenship - including the national establishment of Warrior Transition Units at the Army's major installations nationwide.

"As we've said before, the Army takes Soldier inpatient and outpatient care very seriously," said CSA GEN George W. Casey, Jr., "and remains firmly committed to returning our Soldiers to productive careers and lives. We have made improvements, but realize there is still work to be done - including work with the complex Medical Evaluation Board and Physical Evaluation Board processes. By no means is everything 'fixed' - but we are aggressively acting on what we can fix now."

The Army continues partnering with the Defense Department and the Department of Veterans Affairs on efforts to smooth transition from one organization to another, streamline bureaucracy, and offer education about symptoms and care. The Army Medical Action Plan includes significant current improvements in leadership and services enhancing a Soldier-centric healthcare system. Immediate improvements include:

**Establishing Command and Control.** U.S. Army Medical Command has consolidated Medical Hold units for active duty Soldiers and Medical Holdover units for Reserve Component Soldiers into single Warrior Transition Units, and assumed command and control of these units. Assigning all Soldiers, regardless of component, under one command, ensures equity in care, leadership and administrative support.

**Transition Triad.** Army Medical Command also established a provisional Warrior Transition Unit command and control structure of active and Reserve personnel that includes a primary care manager, nurse case manager, and a squad leader triad for each Warrior in Transition.

**Increased Priority to Transition Families.** The Senior Mission Commander, typically the installation commander, now makes Warrior in Transition facilities and furnishings top priorities for repairs and improvements. The Senior Mission Commanders also conduct monthly town hall meetings for Warriors and their Families.

**Placing Greater Focus on Family Support.** The Army conducted a meeting in May with leaders, Soldiers, Family Members, and veterans to work issues facing Families of wounded Soldiers and Warriors in Transition. Attendees developed the structure, functions, roles, and responsibilities of a prototype Soldier and Family Assistance Center. These centers were stood up at Walter Reed Army Medical Center and Brooke Army Medical Center, and similar capabilities are being established Army wide.

**Enhancing Physical Evaluation Board Representation.** The Army called 18 Reserve Component lawyers and paralegals to active duty to provide additional legal advocacy for warriors undergoing the Physical Evaluation Board process. These personnel act as legal advocates for Warriors in Transition as they move through the Physical Evaluation Board process.

**Caring for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder/Traumatic Brain Injury.** The Army plans other major changes as part of this comprehensive Army Medical Action Plan. Next month, the Army will roll out an extensive educational program on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury for all its Soldiers and leaders.

Continuing improvements under the Army Medical Action Plan support the Army's Warrior Ethos of "I will never leave a fallen comrade" by promoting changes in the Army's system of caring for warriors in transition and establishing long-term solutions for a productive career and life.

## **Lean Six Sigma efforts near \$2B in savings**

**WASHINGTON (Army News Service)** - Lean Six Sigma techniques implemented throughout the Army continue to prove successful, and leaders anticipate reaching a \$2 billion-savings mark this year.

One of the latest LSS successes took place at West Point, NY, home of the U.S. Military Academy. Five officers-in-training who had completed green belt training applied a lean process called value stream analysis to figure out more efficient meal scheduling, which would result in a reduction in the amount of discarded meals in the mess hall.

The cadets were able to predict how many of their brethren dined on certain optional meal days and in the end were able to show how the school could save precious resources by cutting costs and more efficiently allocating resources.

LTC Donna Korycinski, the cadets' advisor, teacher, mentor and project director, said her students understand the LSS process, were able to pull the techniques together and in the process they're leaving a "long-lasting legacy at West Point."

Director of the Army Staff LTG James Campbell has been using LSS techniques to improve the way "taskers" are processed in Washington. He commissioned a study, and while he found some efficiencies were already in place, there were many steps that could be eliminated through an automated system. Reducing waste and speeding up the information-management process was made a top priority because in the end, he said, moving information efficiently to and from senior leaders is the key to success for an effective staff.

Other LSS successes since the program's inception include the "Just Do It" Army recruiting process. Before LSS implementation, 32 steps were required to process recruits. Today, that number is down to 11.

At Ft Bragg, NC's Central Issue Facility, a one-stop equipment and clothing outlet for base Soldiers was able to reduce issue and turn-in times by 50 percent and its inventory by more than 65 percent. Installation officials expect a 20-percent cost savings by October.

Employees at Red River Army Depot, TX, focused on projects involving the Bradley fighting vehicle to earn almost \$600,000 in savings. Fuel-recycling initiatives there also saved more than 37,000 gallons of fuel, with a value of roughly \$85,000 in just one year.

For more information on the Army Business Transformation Strategic Framework go to [www.army.mil/armybtkc](http://www.army.mil/armybtkc).

## **Information for Retired Soldiers in your recruiting mission**

### **Army introduces 2-year enlistment bonus, raises 3-year bonus**

**FT KNOX, KY (Army News Service)** - The U.S. Army Recruiting Command has introduced two new enlistment incentives.

A bonus of up to \$51,864 is available to recruits signing up for a two-year enlistment in more than 45 active-Army military occupational specialties.

A maximum combined bonus for a three-year enlistment was also raised to \$25,000 for MOSs. The previous maximum amount for a three-year enlistment was \$10,000, or \$20,000 for a limited number of priority MOSs.

Qualified recruits who enlist for two years plus training are eligible for an enlistment bonus of up to \$15,000, which can be combined with the Montgomery GI Bill and Army College Fund of \$36,864. These incentives are available to qualified recruits who enlist in one of more than 45 job specialties, including fire support specialist (13F), signal support systems specialist (25U), petroleum supply specialist (92F), pharmacy specialist (68Q) and health-care specialist (68W).

Payment of bonuses for which recruits qualify begins after completion of basic combat and advanced individual training.

For more information go to [www.goarmy.com](http://www.goarmy.com).

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## **TRICARE is adding My Benefits Web tool**

**FALLS CHURCH, VA** – The Web will get easier for the 9.1 million TRICARE beneficiaries. Soon you will be able to access TRICARE information tailored for you through the new My Benefits portal on [www.tricare.mil](http://www.tricare.mil). In addition to simplified navigation, beneficiaries will be able to compare plans, get detailed information on services covered by TRICARE, and much more. The improved portal also allows beneficiaries to easily print content, as well as save multiple sections of content into a single document—a personalized TRICARE handbook (or E-book). With just a few clicks, beneficiaries can quickly find all the information you need about your health care benefit.

Results of an online survey revealed that visitors to the original [www.tricare.mil](http://www.tricare.mil) site were overwhelmed by content and complexity of the TRICARE benefit. Users expressed frustration with surfing through the numerous benefit options and content redundancies. Beneficiaries participated in the process through hands-on testing of the new features.

Upon entering the My Benefits portal, you will answer a few questions about yourself including your military status, where you live and your TRICARE health plan. When you answer these three questions, you'll find the content tailored to meet your needs. Beneficiaries will no longer have to wade through pages of content to find the information that pertains to them. If beneficiaries aren't sure about their TRICARE plan, the Plan Wizard—one of the revamped site's new features—shows them the plans for which they may be eligible. An online demo of the new portal is available at [www.tricare.mil/overview/](http://www.tricare.mil/overview/).